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AUTHOR Peshbach, Norma Deitch
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ABSTRACT

Problems encountered in cross-cultural research are discussed in this report which describes a study of the relationship between social class differences and maternal teaching patterns of 2- and 3-year-old children. The study involved a total of 63 mother-child dyads from middle- and working-class groups in Bristol, England and 34 Kuwaiti mother-child dyads from a traditional middle-class group and a group in which middle-class status was recently achieved. English mothers' teaching style and reinforcing patterns were observed as they asked their children to perform five cognitive tasks. Questionnaires which measured maternal stress were administered to these mothers. Kuwaiti mothers were asked to teach their children four tasks, and mother-child interactions were observed. Data were analyzed for material social class differences in: (1) verbal behaviors such as negative statements, imperatives, information-giving statements, and questions; (2) nonverbal behaviors including handling the materials and using physical guidance or restraint; (3) response consistency over the different tasks. In the English sample, the relationship of maternal stress to negative maternal behaviors was also investigated. Performance, as a function of social class, was compared between the English and Kuwaiti children. (BRT)

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Maternal Teaching Styles: Issues and Problems In Cross-Cultural Variations*

Norma Deitch Feshbach

University of California, Los Angeles

Introduction

The psychologist engaged in cross-cultural research is confronted with a dilemma that is becoming increasingly difficult to resolve. The necessity of extending behavioral observations beyond the narrow confines of white, middle class, American samples is self-evident. Meeting this requirement, however, involves methodological and perhaps ethical issues which are sometimes less evident. Data collected in multicultural contexts are key sources of information for the development of a comprehensive theory and description of the psychology of the child. The importance of these cross-cultural data is matched by the difficulty of their collection and interpretation.

The two aspects of this dilemma are the subject matter for this presentation. A brief presentation of two recent studies that we carried out in England and in Kuwait will provide the vehicle for a discussion of these issues. These two studies are part of a research program designed to extend and test some inferences derived from findings yielded by an earlier series of cross-cultural studies.

In the initial set of studies, maternal and peer teaching behavior

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patterns were studied in lower and middle class populations in the United States, Israel, and England, with some effort made to include ethnic variations in the United States sample. In all of these different settings a four year old was required to teach a simple task to a three year old. In addition, each four year old was subsequently taught a similar but somewhat more complex task by his/her mother. In general, the findings obtained in each of these cultural settings yielded a consistent pattern--namely, middle class mothers tended to use less negative reinforcement than lower class mothers while middle class children used more positive reinforcement than their lower class counterparts. The relatively greater use of negative reinforcement, especially by lower class mothers was interpreted as a reflection of the greater stress which characterizes the lower class environment (Feshbach, 1973). A further study, examining a broader array of teaching behaviors within an American middle class sample, indicated that use of negative reinforcement was part of a more general pattern of intrusion and directedness (Bercovici & Feshbach, 1973). Assuming that the stress hypothesis is valid, these findings point to the role of individual as well as ecological factors in mediating possible maternal stress-related behaviors.

A desire to obtain more direct information on maternal stress in different populations, both within and between cultural groups, was one of the motivations prompting the present investigation. This project was also addressed to a number of other issues. We were interested in ascertaining whether the cross-cultural similarities in social class differences observed in maternal teaching patterns with four year olds were characteristic of maternal interactions with younger children. Information regarding the developmental emergence of differences in

mother-child interactions appeared relevant toward our understanding of the origins of these behaviors and their potential impact upon the child.

Methodological questions regarding the experimental procedures and context were also guiding concerns in planning the new study. We were particularly interested in broadening the range of tasks and in determining the degree of consistency in maternal teaching behaviors across these varied situations. In addition, we decided to carry out these observations in the context of the home rather than in a school or laboratory environment.

Perhaps our most ambitious goal was the sampling of populations drawn from nonwestern countries, notably Kuwait and Egypt. These two countries along with England, the United States and Israel, will constitute, eventually, the multicultural settings from which mothers and children from different socioeconomic strata will be sampled. At the present time data are available from England and Kuwait, subject to a number of methodological constraints. Before presenting these data, I would like to briefly discuss some of the experimental constraints and problems encountered in this research project.

Some Methodological Issues

Enlisting parent participation is a pervasive problem in developmental research, and one which becomes exaggerated in another country. The problem of obtaining appropriately designated samples of cooperative parents in a different culture who will open their homes to your intrusion is not an easy one. However, its difficulty becomes dwarfed by the requirement of selecting a variety of teaching tasks that would be

equally applicable to all cultures involved and to all social classes, and that would allow a representative array of maternal teaching behaviors as well as meet psychometric strictures. Naively, we actually embarked upon this chimeric venture, but after spending many months in this exploration, finally adopted a more realistic perspective. Even assuming the economic feasibility of such an ambitious undertaking, it is my belief that the notion of task equivalence across cultures is untenable on theoretical and methodological grounds.

What criteria should be used to determine whether tasks have equivalent valence, stimulus saliency and appropriateness in different sociocultural settings? The criteria themselves would be vulnerable to cultural bias and, in addition, would have to be validated in the same manner as the tasks. For example, indices of task interest such as duration of time spent on task, eye movements and fixations, and autonomic changes may be markedly influenced by cultural practices. Exchanging direct eye gazes with status figures may be reinforced in one culture and discouraged in another.

At the same time, the process of task standardization across cultures, may in itself, be a source of bias. For each culture, there is a broad spectrum of potential activities which could be selected as instrumental tasks. If one focuses on those tasks that are common to the various cultures, one may be overlooking those situations and activities which are central to a particular cultural developmental setting.

At a pragmatic level, there are occasionally intrinsic correctives which provide the investigator with feedback as to the inappropriateness of a particular procedure for a particular culture. Such was the case when we attempted to administer in Kuwait the tasks that had been so

extensively pretested in England. There are no magic solutions to these methodological dilemmas. As has been extensively discussed elsewhere, cross-cultural investigations inevitably must entail compromises (Breslin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973; LeVine, 1970). The responsibility of the investigator is to recognize, articulate and communicate the limitations imposed by these compromises. Unfortunately, this admonition, while obvious and perhaps banal, is all too often neglected. When this occurs, overgeneralizations and misinterpretation of data, sometimes with significant social costs, may result. It is under these circumstances that methodological limitations evoke ethical concerns.

It will become apparent in the course of the presentation of the English and Kuwaiti studies that a number of modifications were made in the initial design. Different, but comparable tasks were employed, different but comparable response categories were recoded and different but comparable issues were addressed in the two cultures. Consequently, the data for the English and Kuwaiti samples will be presented separately.

England

The study in England was carried out in the city of Bristol, a thriving, diversified metropolitan port community, located in the southwest of England (Phinney & Feshbach, 1975). The mothers were recruited through playgroups and nursery schools in middle and working class residential areas. The total sample observed consisted of 63 mother-child dyads. The 34 boys and 29 girls ranged in age from 32 to 42 months. Each mother-child dyad was assinged to a socioeconomic group in the basis of four criteria: her education, her husband's education, her husband's job and their residential area. Most of the families were

either clearly middle class (N = 19) or clearly working class (N=26). However, some families could not be clearly assigned to either class and were considered as intermediate groups (N=18).

The activities that were finally selected for use in England were ones that the mother and child could engage in at home in an informal playcontext. They consisted of the following: (1) A toy village: Here the child was given a collection of small houses, trees, farm animals and fences, the mother being asked to have the child make a toy village resembling one made by the experimenter. (2) A sorting task: The mother being asked to have the child sort the pieces from the toy village into four bags. (3) The third task was a nine-piece wooden jigsaw puzzle. (4) A simple color matching game first explained to the mother who then played the game with the child, constituted the forth task. (5) For the fifth task the mother asked the child to duplicate with cuisenaire rods, three simple colored patterns.

The mother's verbal behavior--including: (1) positive statements of praise; (2) negative or punitive or critical statements; (3) questions; (4) imperatives; and, (5) neutral or information-giving statements--was recorded. In addition, nonverbal behaviors including: (1) pointing or touching; (2) moving and handling the material and (3) physical guidance or restraint were also noted. In addition, the child's attention to task was observed. Two trained observers, one of them an English middle class graduate student, carried out the study. Reliability between observers assessed twice during the data collection yielded percentage agreements of 85 and 89 percent.

The first question addressed was related to social class differences in maternal teaching behaviors. Scores for each behavior were obtained

by dividing the frequency of the behavior by time spent on the task, yielding a ratio score adjusted for any possible time differences. An analysis of covariance, with mother's age and child's age as covariates, reflected a number of significant differences between middle and working class mothers, the means for the intermediate group predominantly falling in between these two groups. Middle class, as compared to working class mothers, used fewer negative statements ($p < .001$), fewer imperatives ($p < .01$), asked more questions ($p < .001$), and were less apt to handle the materials ($p < .01$). Also, middle class mothers tended to use less physical guidance, ($p < .07$). It is noteworthy that there were no significant social class differences in time taken to complete the tasks, number of tasks completed, or the child's attention to the tasks. Thus, the social class differences in maternal teaching style cannot be readily attributed to possible differences in the child's performance. Moreover, these social class differences in maternal interactions with 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 year olds corresponded to the differences in social class reinforcement patterns previously observed in mothers of four year olds in the United States, Israel, and England.

A second question addressed in the English study was the consistency of maternal behaviors over the five different tasks. As the pattern of the correlations in Table 1 indicates, there is considerable evidence of response consistency in these different experimental standard situations, particularly for the more negative-intrusive types of behaviors. Despite the variation among these tasks in their structure and cognitive requirements, some requiring discrimination behaviors, and others perceptual motor organization, maternal reactions displayed marked commonality. This evidence of response consistency lends credence to the assumption

that the behaviors manifested by these mothers in these quasi-experimental prototypic of patterns of behavior which may be exhibited outside the experimental situation.

The intercorrelations among the behaviors designated as Positive-Nondirective and those designated as Negative-Intrusive provide additional support for the assumption that the maternal behaviors manifested in the standard teaching situations constitute coherent, meaningful, response patterns. From Table 2 it can be seen that the interrelationships are stronger for the working class sample and for the Negative-Intrusive behaviors. The tendency to use negative critical statements is related to the use of imperatives, directing verbalizations and to nonverbal modes of control through pointing and direct manual guidance.

One of the major objectives of the project was to investigate the relationship of this cluster of Negative-Intrusive behaviors to indices of maternal stress which may possibly underlie this teaching pattern. The Rahe's Recent Life Changes Questionnaire (Rahe, 1969), which is widely interpreted as a measure of stress, was administered to the participating mothers. Since this instrument has yielded similar distributions when employed cross-culturally in other countries, we felt some assurance in its selection as the principal measure of stress. However, some of the issues raised regarding the multicultural appropriateness of a research procedure also apply to the question of sex-appropriate procedures. Thus, although the Rahe's Recent Life Changes Questionnaire instrument has been used extensively and successfully, the primary population used in its development was service men in the navy. Both middle class and working class mothers felt uncomfortable in completing the schedule and often spontaneously indicated that many of the situations

which they found "bothersome and disturbing" were not included in the instrument. Also, some working class mothers had difficulty in understanding a number of the items. Consequently, the stress component of the project awaits the completion of our own instrument for assessing maternal stress, which we are presently empirically deriving from interviews with mothers in a number of countries.

Kuwait

For our Kuwaiti samples (Meleis & Feshbach, 1975), the stress phase of the study, never reached implementation, but was deflected at the level of translation. The translators advised us that administration of the instrument would be fruitless because of the cultural inappropriateness of many of the items. Thus, the data we have to report is restricted to the mother-child interactions. However, in the process of obtaining even these data we encountered many obstacles and problems which now lead to interpretative difficulties.

The small sovereign Arab sheikdom of Kuwait, a country that is roughly twice the size of Massachusetts, is reported to have the highest per capita gross national product. It is located in the northeastern corner of the Arabian Penninsula, bordered on the south by Saudi Arabia, on the north and west by Iraq and on the east by the Persian Gulf. Much of Kuwait's wealth, derived from the largest oil production in the middle east, is shared among its citizens whose lives are changing profoundly. In addition, a substantial portion of the oil revenues is being spent on health, education and public works.

Before the development of oil which followed World War II, transportation was by camel; homes were either tents or built from mud and usually

accomodated the extended family ranging from 20 to 70 members; women were veiled; and foreign residents were few. Today, transportation is by Cadillacs, extended families are smaller and limited for the most part to patrilineal parents and siblings rather than cousins, nephews, nieces, and matrilineal kin; and approximately 53% of the 900,000 residents are foreigners, mostly from other Arab countries. However, eligibility for a high income, a guaranteed job, a home, education and other benefits and high status treatment require Kuwaiti citizenship (Meleis, 1975).

Since being or not being a Kuwaiti citizen has such an intense impact on the life and fate of a family, it was decided to restrict our sample to only those mothers, who along with their husbands, enjoyed Kuwaiti citizen status. Further, the two social classes included for study are both technically of middle class designation, using income criteria, inasmuch as the social policies in Kuwait has virtually eliminated the lower class. One group of participants has held middle class status for a longer period of time than the second more recent middle class group who are still on the waiting list for land grants and still living in government apartments rather than in their own villas.

The teaching interactions were observed at Mother-Child Health Centers. Our final sample consisted of 34 mother-child dyads; 20 pairs representing the more traditional middle class group and 14 pairs where middle class status was more recently derived. The age of the children for both groups ranged from two years and nine months to three years and two months. Dr. Afaf Meleis, my collaborator, who was born and raised in Egypt, and whose family has spent a considerable amount of time in Kuwait, was responsible for final task selection, standardization of procedures and data collection.

The four specific tasks that were finally used for the Kuwait mother-child interaction were more appropriate to this sample than the set employed in England, but still not sufficiently prototypic of mother-child engagements of this age. For the first task (Draw A Circle Task), the mother is simply asked to teach her child how to draw a circle. The second task (Labeling Animals) consists of four minature, familiar, plastic animals--camel, elephant, lion, monkey. The mother teaches her child the names of these four animals. The third task (Building a Pyramid) requires the mother to teach her child how to make a pyramid from 12 available wooden blocks. Our fourth and final task constituted teaching the child to complete a wooden puzzle, a procedure employed in all of our previous studies. However, this particular 12-piece wooden puzzle, depicting a colorful rooster, was purchased in a toy shop in Kuwait.

A set of mother-child observations, similar but somewhat more extended than the English schedule, was recorded in Arabic and then translated into English. While the data is still not completely analyzed, initial chi square analyses were carried out for each task and for the four tasks combined; the very low response rate of the mothers precluding analyses of variance. This very low response rate of the mothers, especially in the verbal sphere, may be attributed to the atypicalness of the experimental situation or to the fact that in Kuwait it is not the custom for mothers and children to play together or perhaps it may be due to the low cognitive expectations for children at this age.

Nevertheless, a number of differences and patterns are still apparent in the data. As can be seen from the various breakdowns in Table 3, traditional, middle class mothers tend to use positive verbal reinforcement

and smile more often than do recent middle class mothers, the differences being significant for several of the tasks. On the other hand, more recent middle class mothers are more likely to make deprecatory comments regarding their child's ability, such as "he can't do it", during the actual task and in the pretask period.

In contrast to the English data, the performance of the Kuwaiti children varied markedly as a function of social class, the more recent middle class group making significantly more errors than the children in the more established middle class group. Traditional middle class children smile more often and pay more attention to their mother and to the task (Table 4). Thus, the differences observed in maternal behaviors could be determined by the differences in the behaviors of the children.

The striking social class differences in the behaviors of the Kuwaiti three year olds, while posing interpretative problems, is a serendipitous finding of considerable interest. Our previous studies (Feshbach, 1973) have not indicated social class differences at this early age. If these differences are indeed representative of the broader matrix of cognitive skills, it suggests that the rapid changes in social class may have disruptive cognitive effects making Kuwait a unique site in which to study the dynamics of the relationship between social class and cognitive performance. It may well be that families who have recently entered the middle class have resolved the stress of poverty only to experience the stress of cultural discontinuity.

Although the extension of our research program to an eastern, Arabic society, required considerable changes in research procedures, it appears that the data yielded by this cross-cultural effort is meaningful. The strategy of adapting experimental procedures to a particular cultural

setting is methodologically defensible when one is interested in the between-culture consistency of within-culture relationships. The methodological propriety of direct cross-cultural comparisons of behavioral similarities and differences based on identical or adapted procedures is usually less defensible.

Thus, a cross-cultural comparison of the relationship between maternal stress and maternal teaching styles is a different research question and poses different methodological issues than direct cross-cultural comparisons of maternal stress or of maternal teaching styles. It is primarily studies falling within this latter research category that have been the occasion for methodological and ethical critiques of the use of experimental procedures in cross-cultural investigations.

Descriptive statements about cultural attributes, absolutely and comparatively, demand an approach that goes beyond the laboratory to include more naturalistic, ethological procedures (Barker, 1968; McGrew, 1972; Willems & Raush, 1969). These latter procedures cannot only provide relevant data, but can provide the context necessary for understanding and interpreting the meaning of the gathered data. The relationships between the cross-cultural, naturalistically-obtained data sets, and between the cross-cultural, experimentally-obtained data sets, and most importantly, between the descriptive and the experimental observations within cultures all bear upon the validity and meaning of multi-cultural analyses. While these recommendations may provide a partial solution to the problems posed by this area of research, any solution, nevertheless, remains a compromise, one's particular research problem determining the direction and extent of the compromise.

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Table 1

Intercorrelations (Pearson R) Among Tasks Used in the English Study

		Village With				Puzzle With			Sort With		Game With Rods
		Puzzle	Sort	Game	Rods	Sort	Game	Rods	Game	Rods	
Positive-nondirective	Positive rf	.50***	.15	.20	.13	.24	.17	.37**	.11	.18	.34**
	Statements	.51***	.18	.18	.32**	.23	.33**	.14	.09	.02	-.01
	Questions	.36**	.38**	.31*	.58***	.37*	.24	.28*	.31*	.20	.20
Negative intrusive	Negative rf	.21	.50***	.53***	.49***	.32**	.36**	.42***	.52***	.49***	.49***
	Imperative	.44***	.52***	.29*	.59***	.34*	.07	.54***	.28*	.66***	.42***
	Pointing	.15	.21	.32**	.31*	.12	.04	-.03	.11	.19	.29*
	Moving	.41***	.28*	.42***	.53***	.27*	.39**	.62***	.15	.26*	.48***
	Physical guidance	.10	.49***	.35**	.59***	.27*	.42***	.32**	.47***	.50***	.64***

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 2

Pearson Product Moment Correlations of Mother's Behaviors for the English Sample

A. Working Class Mothers

	Positive-nondirective			Negative-instrusive				
	Positive	Statement	Question	Negative	Imperative	Point	Move	Guide
Positive								
Statement	.44**							
Question	.23	.54***						
Negative	.18	.07	-.03					
Imperative	-.07	.13	-.33	.35				
Point	.13	.18	.03	.60***	.26			
Move	-.01	-.05	-.21	.39	.47***	.43**		
Guide	-.30	-.35	-.52**	.34	.46**	.57**		

B. Middle Class Mothers

	Positive-nondirective			Negative-instrusive				
	Positive	Statement	Question	Negative	Imperative	Point	Move	Guide
Positive								
Statement	-.25							
Question	-.31	.07						
Negative	-.04	.12	.02					
Imperative	.21	-.37	-.43	.52**				
Point	.02	-.30	.21	.03	.23			
Move	.14	-.31	-.39	.13	.35	-.26		
Guide	.36	-01	-.20	.34	.45*	.20	.23	

* $p < .06$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 3

Comparisons of Teaching Behaviors in Two Samples of Kuwaiti Mothers

	0-2	Number of Positive Reinforcements	>2
Traditional Middle class	12		8
More Recent Middle class	11		3
	0-2	Number of Smiling Responses	>2
Traditional Middle class	6		14
More Recent Middle class	10		4
	0	Number or Pretask Deprecatory Responses	1, >1
Traditional Middle class	19		1
More Recent Middle class	5		9
	0-1	Frequency of Pointing	>1
Traditional Middle class	6		8
More Recent Middle class	18		2

Table 4

Comparisons of Performance and Behaviors in Two Samples of Kuwaiti Children

A. Average Number of Correct, Partially Correct and Completely Incorrect Solutions

	Traditional Middle Class	Recent Middle Class
Correct	8.0	1.5
Partially Correct	8.8	6.0
None Correct	3.2	6.5

B. Mean Frequencies of Children's Responses

		Traditional Middle Class	Recent Middle Class
Affect	Positive	2.5	.43
	Negative	.65	1.9
Attention	Engaged	4.7	1.7
	Inattentive	1.9	2.9